

CU Buffs' Nikki Lindow excels in volleyball after leaving rodeo behind

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BOULDER — With the toughness of a cowgirl and the athleticism of a two-sport collegiate athlete, Nikki Lindow goes far beyond your average University of Colorado student. Throw in her through-the-roof maturity and easygoing personality and you'll understand why Buffs volleyball coach Liz Kritza calls Lindow "a special, special kid."

The 6-foot-2 Lindow is a standout junior middle blocker, a champion barrel racer and a ranch hand from Erie. She stays busy because there is always a horse to be trained, hay to be baled or a volleyball to be spiked. Despite playing just two years of competitive high school volleyball, Lindow leads CU (13-9, 3-7 Pac-12) with 111 blocks. She is second in kills (174) and points (242).

Volleyball, however, is only a means to an end for Lindow. She hopes to continue her barrel racing career and eventually become a horse trainer after graduating from CU and, she hopes, getting a chance to play volleyball overseas.

"I miss the atmosphere, getting dirty — being around all these California chicks (is tough)," Lindow said, joking about her love of the rodeo. "Seems like most of the student population here is from California. I'm used to these redneck girls. I don't want to lower down my teammates or anything, but I miss the roughnecking, getting dirty."

Lindow rode a horse named Daisy Due to a National Barrel Horse Association championship early in her teens. She said she has won "millions of ribbons and some cash" from her barrel racing, the latter minuscule compared to the expense of competing, such as horse feed, food and fuel.

Her second love? A tie between basketball and volleyball. She began playing both as a youth in Erie, a little more at Centaurus High School in Lafayette and a whole bunch of volleyball in Parker during her final two years of high school. That's when she joined the Front Range Volleyball Club in Parker, a nationally known organization that helps prepare youngsters for the college game and beyond.

"We are a very competitive family, and once I started growing into my lanky self, I realized I'm faster than these girls, jumping higher, and I could play at a higher competitive level," she said. "So that's why I transferred from Erie to Centaurus, and then played volleyball in Parker. I wasn't going to get here (a Division I scholarship) if I stayed in Erie."

Lindow was a two-sport recruit by Division II's Metro State, among others, when current CU women's basketball coach Linda Lappe was the head coach of the Roadrunners. Generously listed at 6-foot-2, Lindow chose to focus on volleyball because she wanted to keep her slender frame and not be forced to gain weight to compete in the paint with post players. However, during her freshman year at CU — Lappe's first season with the Buffs — a handful of basketball players suffered injuries and Lindow was asked to join the team. Kritza signed off, just before Lindow's nagging shin-splint pain was rediagnosed as four stress fractures.

"I really missed basketball and wanted to play, but after they told me I had the stress fractures, I was reminded that I'm playing (volleyball) against girls who have been playing 10 years of club," Lindow said. "I have to make up for that time. I have to focus on what got me here."

Lindow is a three-year starter for Kritza, who referred to her middle blocker as a "calculated risk" during the recruiting process.

"Really great athlete, and really fierce competitor — that's probably the best thing about her," Kritza said.

"Without having a ton of volleyball-specific experience, you could see she's a special kid, and we knew if she was in the right place and she got a lot of opportunity to play early, she would develop into a really strong player.

"That's what happened. She came to a program that was building at the time and took the athleticism that she had and really started to hone her skills during competition. She's been playing for me ever since she got here. That was by design."

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